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## **Belgium-Luxembourg**

### **Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety**

# **A New Disease Ravages Beech Forests in Eastern Belgium 2002**

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#### **Report Highlights:**

**In 2001, a disease, caused by the scolytoid beetle, damaged up to 20 percent of the trees in beech forests in the Belgian province of Luxembourg. The disease has also been detected in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the German region of Rhenania-Palatinate and the North-East of France.**

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The Walloon Division of Nature and Forestry (DNF) estimates that in 2001 a disease, spread by the scolytid beetle, damaged a volume of 1.3-1.6 million cubic meter out of 7-8 million cubic meter of standing beech wood. The disease was first detected in the spring of 2000. In 2001, 18 percent of the logged beech trees in the Belgian province of Luxembourg were attacked by the disease, decreasing to 9-10 percent of the trees in 2002. The damage caused by the disease leads to an average loss in value of the logs of about \$80 per cubic meter or 60 percent, while badly attacked logs become worthless. The difficulty of detecting the presence of the disease before cutting the tree complicates efforts to estimate the impact of the disease on beech forests.

Experts from the Agronomy Faculty of Gembloux have determined that the scolytid beetle and the accompanying fungal disease emerged after bark started loosening, probably as a result of a sudden freezing cold in the winter of 1998-1999. In 2002, the rate of occurrence is declining with only 2-3 percent of new attacks recorded. An alternative hypothesis holds that this is an unidentified disease and that scolytid beetle attacks are a secondary effect. It also appears that the disease is influenced by altitude as no infections have been registered below 350 meters.

The disease is also present in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the German state of Rhénania-Palatinat, while the situation is unclear in the North-East of France. Next year, Luxembourg and Rhénania-Palatinat are starting a 3-year EU-funded INTERREG 3a study on this beech problem. Surveys indicate that in some areas of Luxembourg between 30 and 50 percent of the beech trees might be infected and that, in spite of decreasing beetle numbers, the number of infected trees is increasing dramatically.

**OAA comments:**

Harvesters buy standing trees and forests, which means that they face high risks. This results in the sales of low quality logs at low prices (between 50 and 70 Euros per cubic meter), depressing the whole market. Reportedly, loads sometimes do not meet certified standards, leading to distrust. At the same time, because large diameters are more severely attacked by the disease, high quality beech logs are scarce in Belgium and sawmills, which used to buy almost exclusively Belgian beech, are turning to imports. Imports are sourced from different origins. Although some countries do not allow exports of logs, Eastern European countries sell cheap beech. For high quality, sawmills buy from France. As the impact of the disease will last for years, prices for quality beech logs are expected to increase significantly. This may lead to opportunities for U.S. exports.